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SUBJECT: HIZBALLAH MP APPEALS FRENCH AL-MANAR BAN; MEETS
WITH MFA

REF: 04 PARIS 8944

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR JOSIAH ROSENBLATT, FOR REAS
ONS 1.4 B/D

11. (C) Summary: In the coming weeks, the Conseil d'Etat, France's highest administrative court, will release a decision on Hizballah satellite television station al-Manar's appeal of its 2004 ban from broadcasting into France. Two Lebanese deputies, Hassan Fadlalah of Hizballah and Abdallah Farhat, visited Paris October 6 to lobby the Conseil Superieur de l'Audiovisuel (CSA), France's FCC-equivalent, for the reinstatement of al-Manar's broadcast license. The two MP's were also received at the MFA and by French parliamentarians. A contact from the CSA told Poloff October 6 that Lebanese media are rife with rumors that a political deal has been cut with the GOF allowing al-Manar back on the air in France. She dismissed these rumors, saying those that spread them did not understand the separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches. End summary.

12. (C) Poloff spoke October 6 with Isabel Mariani, International Affairs director at the CSA. Mariani confirmed that al-Manar programming on Nilesat and Arabsat (based out of Egypt and Saudia Arabia, respectively) have no presence in Europe. She said it was possible that people with satellites in Europe's outlying areas, such as Malta or Corsica, could get feeds that were being transmitted to North African countries, but it was technically impossible for someone living in hexagonal France to receive Nilesat or Arabsat signals. Mariani added that a Dutch satellite company had been transmitting al-Manar earlier in 2005, but it had stopped doing so, which meant that al-Manar is at the moment excluded from broadcasting in Europe, at least via satellite.

13. (C) Mariani confirmed that the Conseil d'Etat is expected to rule on an al-Manar appeal within the coming weeks. She would not speculate on how the Conseil d'Etat might rule, but did say that the CSA believes it followed all procedures for banning al-Manar (reftel). To win the appeal, al-Manar would have to demonstrate it was complying with France's broadcasting code of conduct, said Mariani, and she did not believe the Hizballah satellite television station had done so. Mariani asked what Poloff knew about the latest al-Manar developments, and said that Lebanon is filled with rumors that the Conseil d'Etat will allow the station back on the air because of Lebanese government political pressure on the GOF. Mariani said she believed there was nothing to this, and those passing rumors did not understand France's separation of powers. Mariani's interest in political rumors in Lebanon became clear on October 7, with an AFP report on the official visit to Paris of two Lebanese deputies, Hassan Fadlalah of Hizballah and Abdallah Farhat, to lobby for al-Manar. Fadlalah had meetings with CSA president Dominique Baudis, as well as French officials at the MFA, the Ministry of Culture, the National Assembly and the Senate. He emphasized al-Manar's "willingness" to "work within French law."

14. (C) MFA Lebanon/Syria desk officer Remy Bouallegue confirmed that Fadlalah and another, non-Hizballah Lebanese MP were received at the MFA October 6 at the DAS-equivalent level, but downplayed the significance of the meeting. Bouallegue said the purpose of the MPs' visit to Paris was principally to meet with CSA President Baudis and, to a lesser degree, meet with French parliamentarians. He described the MFA meeting as largely a formality, and standard practice when Lebanese parliamentary delegations come to France. He could not confirm whether other Hizballah MP's had ever been received at the MFA. The two MP's also met with French Ministry of Culture officials. Please visit Paris' Classified Website at:
<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/eur/paris/index.c> fm
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